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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000266

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR  
WILLIAMS/SHAMPAINE/BELGRADE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2017  
TAGS: PREL PGOV PBTS KHUM KWBG KPAL IS  
SUBJECT: WAQF ADMINISTRATOR: EXCAVATIONS AT HARAM  
AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT

REF: A. JERUSALEM 252  
1B. TEL AVIV 441

CLASSIFIED BY: CONSUL GENERAL JAKE WALLES, PER REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: THE CONSUL GENERAL MET WITH WAQF ADMINISTRATOR ADNAN HUSSEINI, GRAND MUFTI MOHAMMED HUSSEIN AND SHEIKH ABDEL AZIZ SALHAB FEBRUARY 8 TO DISCUSS THE MUGHRABI GATE RAMP TO THE HARAM AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT. HUSSEINI SAID THE GOI HAD NOT COORDINATED WITH THE WAQF ON THIS PROJECT. HUSSEINI AND SALHAB ALSO DENIED PRESS REPORTS CLAIMING THAT THE WAQF WAS PART OF A DECISION TO DELAY THE WORK BY ONE WEEK TO ALLOW INSTALLATION OF A NEW MINBAR TO THE AL AQSA MOSQUE. HUSSEINI SAID HE FEARS THAT REMOVAL OF THE DIRT FROM THE OLD RAMP AND CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW RAMP COULD DAMAGE THE ROOMS ADJACENT TO THE WALL UNDER THE HARAM/TEMPLE MOUNT AND ALLOW ISRAELI ACCESS BELOW THE GATE INTO THE AREA UNDERNEATH THE HARAM/TEMPLE MOUNT. APPROXIMATELY 150 PEOPLE PROTESTED ON FEBRUARY 8 OUTSIDE THE DUNG GATE (THE OLD CITY GATE CLOSEST TO THE MUGHRABI GATE RAMP). HUSSEINI SAID HE EXPECTS IMAMS THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD WILL ADDRESS THE ISSUE DURING FRIDAY PRAYERS ON FEBRUARY 9, AND HE FEARS AN OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE. THE GOI AGREED FEBRUARY 8 TO HALT CONSTRUCTION WORK FOR TWO DAYS (REFTEL B), AND HUSSEINI CONFIRMED THAT NO WORK WAS ONGOING FEBRUARY 9 AND THAT TWO OF THE FOUR BULLDOZERS HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM THE SITE. END SUMMARY.

HUSSEINI: NO COORDINATION, CONCERNS ABOUT VIOLENCE

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12. (C) ADNAN HUSSEINI, ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE WAQF, DENIED DURING A FEBRUARY 8 MEETING WITH THE CONSUL GENERAL THAT THE WAQF THE GOI HAD COORDINATED WITH THE WAQF ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT THE MUGHRABI GATE RAMP. HE SAID THAT IT IS "NOT TRUE" THAT THE WAQF WAS INVOLVED A DECISION TO DELAY THE PROJECT BY ONE WEEK TO ALLOW THE INSTALLATION OF THE NEW MINBAR. (NOTE: JORDANIAN KING ABDULLAH PROVIDED THE MINBAR TO REPLACE THE ONE GIVEN BY SALAH EDDIN BUT DESTROYED BY AN ARSONIST IN 1969.) HUSSEINI SPECULATED THE CONSTRUCTION MAY HAVE BEEN TIMED TO EMBARRASS KING ABDULLAH. HE ALSO CAST DOUBT ON GOI CLAIMS THAT IT HAD COORDINATED WITH UNESCO, WHICH HUSSEINI SAYS HAS NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO SEND OBSERVERS INTO THE OLD CITY SINCE 1997.

13. (C) HUSSEINI SAID HE IS CONCERNED THAT THE EXCAVATIONS AND CONSTRUCTION COULD DAMAGE ROOMS LOCATED ADJACENT TO THE PERIMETER WALL OF HARAM/TEMPLE MOUNT. HE ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERNS THAT THE WORK WILL ALLOW ISRAELI ACCESS BELOW THE GATE TO THE AREA UNDERNEATH THE HARAM/TEMPLE MOUNT. HUSSEINI SAID THAT THE SERMONS FOR FRIDAY PRAYERS FEBRUARY 9

THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD WOULD DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF THE EXCAVATIONS, AND THAT HE FEARED VIOLENCE IF THE EXCAVATIONS CONTINUED. GRAND MUFTI HUSSEIN COMMENTED THAT SHARON'S VISIT (IN 2000, WHICH PRECEDED THE START OF THE SECOND INTIFADA) HAD LASTED ONLY 40 MINUTES. "WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS WILL DO?"

SITE VISIT

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14. (C) FOLLOWING THE CONSUL GENERAL'S MEETING, POLOFF VISITED THE EXCAVATION SITE AND WALKED DOWN THE ORIGINAL EARTHEN AND WOODEN RAMPS. (DIGITAL PICTURES NEA/IPA.) THERE WAS A SIGNIFICANT ISRAELI POLICE PRESENCE SURROUNDING THE EXCAVATION SITE, AND POLOFF OBSERVED THAT HUSSEINI WAS PREVENTED FROM EXITING THE HARAM/TEMPLE MOUNT VIA THE MUGHRABI GATE. PER REF A, THE PLANNED NEW RAMP WOULD REPLACE THE WOODEN STRUCTURE BUILT IN FEBRUARY OF 2005 AFTER TORRENTIAL RAINS COLLAPSED PART OF THE EARTHEN RAMP. IT WOULD BE 200 METERS LONG AND WOULD EXTEND FROM THE MUGHRABI GATE TO NEAR THE DUNG GATE.

15. (C) DANNY SEIDEMANN, FOUNDER OF THE ISRAELI HUMAN RIGHTS NGO IR AMIN, TOLD POLOFF FEBRUARY 8 THAT HE EXPECTED A RULING FROM ATTORNEY GENERAL MENACHEM MAZUZ ON HIS APPEAL TO STOP THE EXCAVATIONS ON FEBRUARY 11. SEIDEMANN SAID THE BUILDING PERMIT FOR THE MUGHRABI GATE RAMP WAS GRANTED ILLEGALLY AND THAT HE WROTE MAZUZ ASKING THAT THE EXCAVATION AND CONSTRUCTION BE STOPPED. THE GOI AGREED FEBRUARY 8 TO HALT EXCAVATIONS FOR TWO DAYS (REFTEL B), AND HUSSEINI CONFIRMED THAT NO WORK WAS ONGOING FEBRUARY 9. HE SAID TWO OF THE FOUR BULLDOZERS HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM THE SITE, AND THE REMAINING TWO WERE MOVED SLIGHTLY OFF OF THE ORIGINAL RAMP. HE HAS DESIGNATED A WAQF EMPLOYEE TO MONITOR THE RAMP FOR SIGNS OF RENEWED WORK.

16. (C) COMMENT: POLOFF (WHO HAS A GRADUATE DEGREE IN ARCHAEOLOGY) OBSERVED THAT THE EXCAVATIONS MAY AFFECT THE STABILITY OF THAT PORTION OF THE HARAM/TEMPLE MOUNT WALL. PRIOR TO 1967, THE WALL WAS EFFECTIVELY BRACED BY THE HOMES OF THE MOROCCAN QUARTER, WHICH THE ISRAELIS DESTROYED IN 1967 TO CREATE THE WESTERN WALL PLAZA, AND BY THE EARTH THAT ACCUMULATED OVER THIRTEEN CENTURIES TO THE LEVEL OF THE MUGHRABI GATE IN THE AREA BETWEEN THE SOUTHERN EDGE OF THE MOROCCAN QUARTER AND THE OLD CITY WALL. MOST OF THE SOIL AT THE SOUTHERN END WAS REMOVED IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING 1967 TO EXPOSE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS OF FIVE 8TH CENTURY STRUCTURES TO CREATE AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK NEXT TO THE HARAM/TEMPLE MOUNT. A SMALL AMOUNT OF EARTH WAS LEFT IN PLACE TO FORM THE 75-METER LONG RAMP TO THE MUGHRABI GATE AND THAT EARTH LIKELY AT LEAST PARTIALLY SUPPORTS THE WALL. EXCAVATIONS IN PREPARATION FOR A NEW RAMP WOULD REMOVE THAT EARTH.

WALLES